

Improving research degree submission and completion Rates: action plan and proposals for good practice

Summary

Following the Review of the City Graduate School considered by Senate at its meeting of 6th May 2015, and further discussion on the University's research degree completion rates at the meeting of Senate on 8 July 2015, the Graduate School asked Schools to propose specific measures to help improve research degree completion rates on their programmes (and to continue to monitor completion rates and planned actions through the annual research degree programme evaluation exercise). An action plan was drafted (including steps proposed by Schools) which was considered by the Graduate School Committee at its meeting on 22 September 2015. Updated data (following discussion at the Graduate School Committee at its meeting on 18 June 2015) and proposals for good practice were also obtained and considered.

The following paper sets out the proposals for good practice, a draft action plan to target an improvement in the University's completion rates and outlines the reasons that underpin the proposed measures. The paper was considered by ExCo at its meeting on 5th October 2015. Members were asked to send comments to the Dean of the Graduate School on aspects of the paper for further consideration at Senate on 14th October 2015. Implementation of the paper would be considered at a further meeting of ExCo thereafter.

Senate is asked to:

1. **note** the updated data on the mean time to complete for full and part-time research students (Appendix 1)
2. **note** the areas of policy informed good practice (Appendix 2)
3. **consider** the draft action plan to help improve the University's research degree completion rates (Appendix 3)
4. **note** ongoing discussions between colleagues in Academic Operations, the Strategy and Planning Unit and the Graduate School on data collection/analysis (see also action 10 of the draft action plan, Appendix 3)
5. **note** that implementation of the paper will be considered at a further meeting of ExCo.

Publication: Restricted

Date/Event on/following which the paper may be released: Never

Freedom of Information Act 2000: 43

Reason for Closed Classification: Commercial Information

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Introduction and background

There has been considerable discussion about and investment in building the research student community at City University London and with that a focus on improving the University's research degree submission and completion rates in recent years. It is generally agreed that good submission rates are desirable for a research-active institution. Submission and completion rates have been topics of discussion regularly at the City Graduate School Committee and at Senate, as well as within Schools. There are differences in these rates across Schools as well as differences in the size and make-up of the research student community there, but critical to making effective proposals for improving these rates is a better understanding of the data available to the University and in the review and development of policy-informed good practice within Schools, with a view to enhancing these rates for the whole University. The following paper proposes measures which reflect good practice and thus are proposed to Schools to help to improve the University's completion rates. Further the paper proposes a draft action plan and the reasons that underpin the proposed measures.

Enhancing submission and completion rates: policy informed practice

Ensuring the best environment for our doctoral students at City is critically important to the strength of our research activity; to underpin the activity of our academic staff; our future REF submission strategy; to our continuing to build our reputation in research; and most importantly for the prospects, maturity and career development of our research students. However, the availability of good PhD students, both from the UK and abroad is limited and the positive influence they have on the research buoyancy and strength of an institution are evident from the successes of some of the most research intensive Universities in the UK. In such a highly competitive market, City needs to continue to raise its game and thus to enhance the rate of completion, a view supported by the City Graduate School Committee. It is clear that this will not happen without attention to the issues involved in successful completion and to provide a focus for change. This paper undertakes a review of good practice and current available data and makes recommendations which are designed to support Schools to improve the completion rates of their students. The proposals are informed by discussions in the last three years at the City Graduate School Committee, at Boards of Studies and at Senate. The aim is to:

- understand better and improve submission and completion rates at City
- take action that will have a positive effect on these rates in most, if not all Schools
- do so on a sustainable basis and as quickly as possible
- not to compromise the quality of the student experience and/or the quality of the research they undertake

It is proposed that to achieve this, the whole research student lifecycle should be considered closely, from start to finish, and areas where there is potential weakness addressed by recommending good practice. This implies that both students and their supervisors must appreciate and accept the need to plan and manage research projects that are both viable and can be completed successfully, ideally within 4 years (full-time; *pro rata* for part-time) and within the available resources which should be identified at the outset of the registration. The reasons behind the proposals are clear and include:

- supported students typically only receive funding for at most 3 years (including most City bursaries); after that they are most likely needing to take paid employment to fund themselves – this inevitably impacts on the time and energy they have to progress their research
- students running beyond the 3 years of study may need to be subsidized for on-going study and this is a drain on resources: physical resources as well as on supervision
- students who fund themselves need to have a realistic idea from the outset of how long they should expect to spend on the work – they may often have contractual commitments for the duration of their study or have to return to employment which has released them to study for a PhD
- whilst writing-up fees after the third year are charged, students may require the most attention from supervisors to complete
- supervision of individual students beyond 4 years reduces the overall research supervision capacity and may inhibit time staff can spend in generating new research.

Underpinning the considerations are the following:

- for both research students and supervisors to have realistic expectations from the outset, of which both are aware and which are recorded and reviewed regularly
- for research students' progress to be tracked more effectively through Research and Progress (RaP)
- for the University's existing procedures to be implemented consistently and effectively and recommendations for good practice acted upon across the University
- for procedures reflecting good practice to be instituted and implemented across all Schools, with a view to enhancing the student experience and submission and completion rates

Internal data on the number of full and part-time research students registered in the University between 2007/08 and 2013/14 and the "mean number of years to complete" are provided in Appendix 1 of this report. Data have been provided by colleagues in Strategy and Planning and Academic Operations to support the discussion at the Graduate School Committee. Appendix 2 provides an overview of good practice – much of already agreed policy at City – but where more consistent implementation could enhance the student experience and completion. Building on that, Appendix 3 provides a draft summary action plan with proposed measures designed to help to embed that good practice and thus to improve the University's completion rates. The paper was considered by ExCo at its meeting on 5th October 2015. Members were asked to send comments to the Dean of the Graduate School on aspects of the paper for further consideration at Senate on 14th October 2015. Implementation of the paper would be considered at a further meeting of ExCo thereafter. Senate is asked to:

1. **note** the updated data on the mean time to complete for full and part-time research students (Appendix 1)
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4. **note** ongoing discussions between colleagues in Academic Operations, the Strategy and Planning Unit and the Graduate School on data collection/analysis (see also action 10 of the draft action plan, Appendix 3)
5. **note** that implementation of the paper will be considered at a further meeting of ExCo.

Appendix 1**Full-time research degree students: mean years to complete/number of students**

Mean years to complete, Full Time students								Average over period Years
School	2007/8	2008/9	2009/0	2010/1	2011/2	2012/3	2013/4	
Cass	5.3	5.7	4.4	5.3	3.7	5.7	5.6	5.0
Law	2.0	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	4.3	3.8
SASS	5.2	3.8	4.9	4.2	5.1	4.8	4.3	4.6
SHS	6.6	6.3	6.3	5.8	6.2	7.4	7.4	6.5
SMCSE	4.4	5.6	6.1	5.7	6.1	6.3	5.7	5.8
City University	5.1	5.0	5.3	4.9	5.0	5.6	5.0	5.1

Number of students who completed, Full Time only								Total number over period
School	2007/8	2008/9	2009/0	2010/1	2011/2	2012/3	2013/4	
Cass	16	20	16	16	27	21	13	129
Law	1						3	4
SASS	19	28	38	33	44	48	32	242
SHS	5	7	8	4	5	10		39
SMCSE	11	15	21	21	22	23	22	135
City University	52	70	83	74	98	102	70	549

SHS 2013/14 no data, 2012/13 data projected forward

Part-time research degree students: mean years to complete/number of students

Mean years to complete, Part Time students								Average over period Years
School	2007/8	2008/9	2009/0	2010/1	2011/2	2012/3	2013/4	
Cass	7.0	N/A	3.0	6.5	9.0	7.0	1.0	6.4
Law	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	10.0	N/A	10.0	10.0
LEAD	N/A	N/A	N/A	5.5	N/A	7.0	7.0	9.5
SASS	5.9	5.3	5.7	6.4	7.3	7.5	7.6	6.8
SHS	10.3	6.4	7.0	8.0	7.4	5.2	6.7	7.1
SMCSE	8.3	7.3	7.0	6.6	8.3	8.4	8.3	7.7
City University	8.1	6.6	6.1	6.5	7.8	7.4	7.3	7.1

Number of students who completed, Part Time students								Total number over period
School	2007/8	2008/9	2009/0	2010/1	2011/2	2012/3	2013/4	
Cass	5		1	2	2	1	1	12
Law					1			1
LEAD	1			2		1		4
SASS	7	4	15	21	13	26	14	100
SHS	4	7	8	2	5	5	7	38
SMCSE	6	10	4	11	11	8	6	56
City University	23	21	28	38	32	41	28	211

Law and LeAD 2013/14 no data, previous data projected forward

Appendix 2: A Good Practice Guide

Stimulating good practice

The proposals outlined below are designed to stimulate discussion at Senate and action at School level – following that comments will be considered by the City Graduate School Committee and if required a formal set of recommendations for any changes to regulations needed will be made to Senate. However, they point to need for change of practice within Schools in some areas – and to do so at different points across the Institution – as it is critical that City is to be seen as competitive in the research student training and success that it offers. Underpinning the good practice is the following:

- both research students and supervisors should have realistic expectations from the outset, of which both are aware and which are recorded and reviewed regularly
- research students' progress should be tracked regularly and in a transparent way to both student and supervisor(s) – at City the agreed tool for this is through the Research and Progress (RaP) platform
- the University's existing procedures should be implemented consistently and effectively and recommendations for good practice should be acted upon across the University
- procedures reflecting good practice should be instituted and implemented consistently across all Schools, with a view to enhancing the student experience and submission and completion rates

A review of current practice, and, where appropriate proposals, for good practice, are grouped into several major themes relating to:

- A. student selection and admission
- B. supervision
- C. mentoring and advising
- D. progression monitoring
- E. registration period
- F. supportive environment

A. Student Selection and Admission

It is important to have mechanisms in place for integrating into the doctoral admissions process particular attention to the 'fit' or 'match' between a particular student and a specific doctoral programme (and the interests and expertise of the supervisor(s)); this to be done alongside the usual considerations of 'student quality'. In certain areas it may be important to pay particular attention to the selection and admission, as well as the retention and success of underrepresented student groups within a cohort e.g. improving gender balance or the underrepresentation of students with disabilities.

Good Practice 1 – *in the student selection and admission process, there should be a particular emphasis on:*

- *Recruitment: Schools have list of available PhD projects or research areas (requesting students to submit research proposals) and potential supervisors on the web, an ExCo agreed requirement; where possible to offer pre-admission visits to Schools; use early research opportunities e.g. undergraduate or Masters projects as a recruitment tool; improve efforts to recruit underrepresented students*
- *Transparency: Improve department websites to ensure that each includes data on research areas or specific projects and other relevant information and resources necessary for prospective students to make informed decisions e.g. case studies and profiles; ensure transparency in the selection processes and clarify expectations for students in their doctoral programmes, including assessment milestones, to support the recruitment process*

- *Admissions: Develop consistent and timely practice in the admissions process: select students based on good 'fit' to programme; survey applicants to determine why admissions offers are accepted or declined.*

B. Supervision

Good supervision of a research student underpins student success and the University reputation for the quality of the research student experience. The quality of this experience stems from good supervision and its support at School level and the sharing of good practice across Schools and the sector more generally. The recent PRES 2015 for City shows the very high level of confidence that students have in their supervisors: in the skills and subject knowledge to support the student's research (92% agree), in providing feedback that helps the student to direct the research activities (89% agree) and in providing feedback that helps the student to direct the research activities (88% agree). Students also understand their responsibilities as a research student (90% agree) and are aware of their supervisors' responsibilities towards them as research degree students (87%). This provides clear evidence in the confidence students have in their supervisory staff and thus an excellent basis on which good submission and completion rates can be built.

However practices relating to the supervision of research students vary across Schools and reflect the different ways they approach and manage the research student experience. Differences in practice can impact on the nature and quality of the student experience and good practice should be shared across the University to enhance this. In order to ensure that there is the consistent good supervision practice that underpins excellent PRES responses in these areas being maintained and thus good completion rates, it is useful to make explicit the nature and extent of good practice at School level and acknowledge key responsibilities.

Good Practice 2 – *in the context of supervising research students, the Dean of School (or nominee) will ensure that:*

- *appropriate supervision is provided for research students and replacement supervision is made available if supervisors are absent for long periods or leave the University*
- *successful supervisory experience and support for enhancing the research student experience are taken into account in staff appraisal, reward and promotion*
- *supervision loads are taken into account in workload allocation models*
- *the progress of each of their research students is routinely monitored through RaP, annual progress reports are submitted on time and appropriate developmental action is agreed where it is needed*
- *the effectiveness of supervisory practices and experiences (including the Category of Supervisor) are regularly reviewed by the Board of Studies, that transfer to and from Category A and Category B is reviewed annually, that problems that arise with particular supervisors are dealt with appropriately and supervisors are encouraged (or indeed may be required) to engage in appropriate professional development activities*
- *supervisor support, through which supervisors can provide peer support and experienced supervisors can mentor less experienced colleagues, should be encouraged through the 'research divisions' of the School (research groups, Research Centres or Departments as appropriate)*
- *students are actively involved in building the research culture of the School through the 'research division'.*

C. Mentoring and Advising

Success in achieving a Ph.D. depends upon a close and effective working relationship with the supervisor(s) who will also take on the role of mentor. Mentoring is also an area that can pose unique challenges to improvements in good practice because mentoring is practiced and valued unevenly in doctoral programmes. Improvements in mentoring and advising the student can play a key role to promote successful completion.

Good Practice 3 – *in the context of mentoring and advising students, good practice includes:*

- *Resources being available for students entering the programme: comprehensive orientation or induction programme (currently done at University level by the City Graduate School) to prepare students for the doctoral study; revised and updated research student handbooks; clearly articulated programme expectations and academic milestones; enhanced online mechanisms (RaP) so students and staff can track progress effectively and communicate with one another; use of online milestone tracking through RaP, and ensuring the completion of annual progress reports that integrate records, student input, and evaluative comments from supervisors.*
- *Regularity and uniformity of progress review: Implementing regular student/supervisor(s) meetings and progress reports as part of annual student performance review.*
- *Critical support: Ensuring that the supervision arrangements that are in place are working; conducting regular informal evaluations of progress; ensuring first-year students know where to seek help (beyond the supervisor(s)) in case of problems.*
- *Resources for staff: Ensuring training/workshops for staff on mentoring are available and taken up; offering encouragements to help staff to develop initiatives aimed at improving the quality of mentoring and supervision; recognizing excellence in mentoring through awards at University and School level.*
- *Peer support and mentoring: Ensuring that first year research students are aware of peer groups across the University e.g. the SU PGR Forum and can have access to that through its representatives in Schools; in Research Centres of groups of sufficient size, ensuring peer mentors through informal systems.*

D. Progression monitoring

One of the key aspects of improving the submission and completion rates is keeping accurate records of students' progress - this is essential for audit and funding purposes (HESA, HEFCE, Research Councils etc). From the point of view of the progress of the work and interaction between the research student and the supervisor, it will help to identify problems and flag the need for appropriate action by students or staff (or both).

The prime mechanism agreed for this at City is through the Research & Progress (RaP), a software tool developed by the University of Manchester and purchased by City. Regular seminars have been presented to staff on the use of RaP and proposals for changes and improvements received following these meetings have been passed to the Manchester researchers, and change implemented. RaP is also the agreed mechanism for monitoring of international students on Tier 4 visas, to respond to government requirements. Annually, a student's progress is monitored and reviewed through the Annual Progress Report, which is incorporated within RaP.

(a) Year 1

An effective and productive first year is key to successful progression for a research student and it is important to have a set of expectations or requirements of what a student should have achieved within the first year that can be applied across the University (and thus are 'subject-independent') as well as subject-specific requirements. The Good Practice below simply makes explicit what should already be happening at present and is designed to assist supervisors and students to track progress within the first year, to enable early identification of any issues which could then be addressed.

Good Practice 4 – *all research students must, within their first year (or pro-rata part-time)*

- *be registered on RaP which will be used by student and supervisors to monitor progress*
- *agree and record on RaP all the key elements of their supervision meetings with their supervisor(s)*
- *attend an approved research student induction programme*
- *undertake such elements of the Doctoral Studies Framework as is agreed with their supervisor(s)*

- *complete and record on RaP a research proposal or plan of work which the supervisor(s) approve as appropriate and viable*
- *agree a projected completion timetable with their supervisor(s)*
- *for students undertaking teaching within the University, undertake an approved programme of training before commencing teaching duties.*

(b) MPhil – PhD Transfer

Almost all research students will be registered initially for a MPhil, with the expectation of transfer to PhD. Only successful students, with the expectation of completing a doctorate successfully will be transferred to registration for a PhD. Thus this initial registration is important to identify those students who are not making progress and to take appropriate action – it is not simply a formality. The outcome of the MPhil – PhD transfer process may include the recommendation for the student to undertake further formal training, to change the direction of the project (and if appropriate the supervision team) or indeed termination of the student's registration.

The way the MPhil-PhD transfer process currently varies between Schools/Departments in a number of important ways, such as when it occurs, what evidence supports it, and how panel members involved in the assessment (and indeed students) reflects the relevance and importance of the event. It must be recognized by all that this is an important decision point for both student and staff and an early indicator that satisfactory completion may be compromised. In addition if a student is to leave the programme of study at around 12 to 15 months, the negative effect on the cv is minimized and the scope for another student to take up the project is enhanced.

Good Practice 5 – *all research students will have an assessment on whether to upgrade from MPhil to PhD between 12 and 15 months of registration (or pro-rata part-time)*

- *any research student who does not demonstrate satisfactory progress (against the agreed criteria) between the first 12 and 15 months of full-time registration (pro rata part-time), should be carefully monitored and supported, informed about any reasons for concerns and set clear objectives with a view to enhance progress and this recorded on RaP*
- *students making satisfactory progress will be upgraded to PhD registration following a formal process of assessment*
- *students judged not to be making satisfactory progress will not be transferred to PhD registration and the project plan of work revised in light of a future assessment or a decision on an MPhil submission or the student's registration terminated at this point. There is the possibility of the student appealing the decision in accordance with current University policy and any such appeal should be dealt with quickly.*

(c) Progression to Year 2 and beyond

Once a research student has progressed into the second year full-time (or pro-rata part-time), the student should be confident in the viability and direction of the project, that the resources needed are (or will be) available to complete the project and in the skills of the supervisor(s) to support the work. The expectations and requirements of what a student should have achieved within successive years will flow from the research proposal and plan of work, as updated and noted on RaP.

Good Practice 6 – *continued registration of each research student in years 2, 3 and as necessary 4 should be conditional upon:*

- *submission of an annual progress report, involving input from the student and supervisor(s)*
- *evidence, confirmed in this report, that is judged as satisfactory and reflects sufficient progress that the student has made with their research/thesis*
- *the timetable to submission and completion underpinning the project plan is updated and thus realistic.*

(d) Progression in Year 3 and beyond, as needed

A research student from the third year of the study should be in a position to be confident to discuss and agree a completion timetable with the supervisor(s) – the details of this should be recorded on RaP. This should be reviewed and updated every 6 months, until submission, to aim to support the student to complete on schedule. It is recognized that slippages and delays can arise for a variety of reasons and these should be actively managed by the student *and* supervisors until submission is achieved.

Good Practice 7 – *each student should agree a realistic completion timetable with the supervisor(s), review/revise it every six months, flagging any reasons for concern and noting what remedial action is being taken on RaP.*

E. Registration Period

Research students are normally admitted for MPhil with the possibility of transfer (upgrade) to PhD subject to satisfactory progress, as discussed earlier.

(a) Maximum period of registration

Most research-intensive HEIs have a maximum period of registration of 4 years full-time (pro rata part time) and City is no exception. In many cases, however, there seems in some cases little incentive for students to complete before the end of the maximum period of registration and supervisors may not always encourage students to complete in a timely way. To move towards what is normal at most research-intensive HEIs, yet recognize the journey that City is on to enhance completion rates, it is proposed to seek the views of Schools to clarify the period of registration and if agreed to put a proposal to Senate as follows:

Good Practice 8 – *a research student should be able to submit the PhD degree within the maximum period of registration*

- *Schools will be asked to comment on the proposal that research students must submit within the maximum period of candidature and*
- *extensions beyond the maximum will only be allowed in exceptional circumstances on the recommendation of School Boards of Studies by the Dean of the City Graduate School.*

(b) Extension of registration

The extension of registration beyond the above proposed period would be exceptional, although students often seek a period of suspension¹ or an extension² for legitimate reasons. Problems can arise with this if:

- there are no explicit criteria against which requests for suspensions/extensions can be evaluated
- requests are not supported by appropriate evidence (i.e. they are based on claims not evidence)
- suspensions and extensions are often sought retrospectively

An essential ingredient for timely submission & completion is the clear management of this aspect of the research student experience, including explicit monitoring of progress, anticipating potential requirements for suspensions & extensions and taking action early to support students appropriately.

Good Practice 9 – *requests for suspensions and extensions should only be approved if they meet agreed criteria, are supported by appropriate evidence, and are formally submitted in advance.*

- *Suspensions and extensions will only be granted retrospectively in exceptional circumstances, where they could not reasonably be foreseen.*

F. Creating an Excellent Research Experience and providing a Supportive Environment

(a) Interaction in a supportive academic and social environment

¹ Suspension: Allowing a student's registration to be extended by the same period.

² Students can extend for an agreed period of time beyond their maximum period of registration by approval.

The degree of social interaction that is familiar in certain subjects where an apprenticeship model, research teams, and a laboratory setting are familiar can provide a more supportive environment than the solitary, individual research with often extended periods without supervisor(s) feedback (that is often characteristic of the humanities or part time students). Preventing isolation and helping students to feel integrated into the community of the University and profession, at an early stage, is important and providing broad support for this is a practice which later can contribute to successful completion. The academic environment of a doctoral programme can be shaped by Department/School-led and University-wide efforts to create the conditions for high expectations, high performance and strong student support. Informal opportunities to participate in department events, regular gatherings, or sporting activities (with City Sport being an important example) may also be important components of a research student's growing confidence in and commitment to their academic discipline.

Good Practice 10 – *creating a supportive social environment and good early research experiences:*

- *Supporting positive early research experiences: encouraging and supporting research students to be involved in activities that build early positive experiences, whether they be in the activities of the research group, the Department or School, the City Graduate School or the University more widely or in the profession or professional body, for example to attend professional meetings.*

Good Practice 11 – *creating a positive academic environment for doctoral students includes*

- *Support networks and support services: bringing students together across disciplines and within the School for academic and social interaction; encouraging research student organizations; promote involvement of research students as members of University-wide, City Graduate School or Department-wide or professional body committees*
- *Making students aware of support services across the University where help and support can be obtained if needed*
- *Highlighting achievements and accomplishments of research students through websites, newsletters, dinners, or other venues*
- *Family-friendly policies: recognizing that many research students are mature student with family responsibilities and supporting students in this way*
- *Encouraging research students to be part of the City Graduate School events and Spring Week.*

(b) A Supportive environment for financial issues

Students and researchers often cite financial support as being among the most influential factors on Ph.D. completion and attrition but there is evidence showing that not all forms of student support are equally beneficial. Thus, financial support – advice, help and opportunities for earning needs to be structured to optimize completion and enhance academic and social integration.

Good Practice 12 – *financial support and structure*

- *Student support: ensuring at an early stage that students are aware of the financial commitment (living costs, fees etc) that are needed for the completion of the course*
- *Earning opportunities: ensuring students are aware of earning opportunities where they need these and that these can be fitted around the research programme e.g. with Unitemps*
- *Ensuring that a student wishing to teach is trained appropriately and thus can benefit both financially and academically from this: enabling the student to develop skills in a constructive peer teaching review environment*
- *Supervisors should make students aware of awards, prizes and other support e.g. for Conference Attendance that may enhance their student experience and minimize financial concerns.*

(c) Supporting writing up, preparing the thesis and preparing for the viva

Supervisor(s) often assume that students are aware of the processes and procedures, as well as the time issues as they come to writing up, submission and the viva, all leading to a successful and completed thesis accepted for the award of the degree. Comments from students in PRES 2015 shows this often is not the

case. Therefore there are a number of areas where good practice can support the students better and thus help to speed completion

Good Practice 13 – *supporting the later stages of the PhD through to final submission and success*

- *Writing assistance for research students: Offer assistance in writing appropriate to the thesis for research students at all stages through courses offered both internally and externally; offer writing assistance to groups of students from several disciplines so they can appreciate the commonality of writing difficulties.*
- *Support During the Dissertation Phase: Encourage student to find the right environment for writing up – the Graduate School Library Centre is a quiet area that can be brought to their attention.*

(d) Employment and careers post-completion

Support from the supervisor(s) can be extremely valuable in advising students on the breadth of career opportunities, providing introductions and the use of the careers services in the University. A focus on a career can be a major incentive in encouraging successful writing up and completion, where success in the doctorate is often a prerequisite for the career.

Good Practice 14 – *supporting research students in understanding the career and employment landscape*

- *Supporting students to understand the breadth of career opportunities available to them*
- *Directing students to the career advice facilities available to research students at City*
- *Helping students to be known in the community e.g. through Conference attendance where they present their work and may meet future employers*
- *Making introductions that may help with career opportunities.*

Summary

The improvement of submission and completion rates is an important target for City in meeting its aspirations for a higher level of research activity. The above Good Practice is commended to Schools and comments will be sought on the Good Practice notes above, as well as the reduction of the maximum period of registration.

City Graduate School

September 2015

#	Proposal	Link to Good Practice Guide #	Action(s)	Theme	Responsibility
1.	Strengthen information available about potential supervisors and projects/research areas and policies and the implementation of processes to improve admissions decisions and enhance recruitment	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure Schools have list of available PhD projects or research areas (requesting students to submit research proposals) and potential supervisors on the web, an ExCo agreed requirement; • Introduce more rigorous screening of applicants, involving a broader group of experienced academics 	Student selection and admission	Schools/Departments
2.	Continual improvement in the provision of high quality supervision overall and implementation of best practice in research supervision	2,3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On-going review of implementation of Policy on Approval of Doctoral Degree Supervisors • Annual review by Boards of Studies of Category A/B status of staff • Implementation of workload allocation model, to take into account supervision loads 	Supervision	Schools/Departments in partnership with City Graduate School Committee
3.	Roles of first and second supervisors made clear to students and staff	2,3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policies within the University and as implemented in Schools to be agreed and disseminated to students 	Supervision	Schools/Departments in partnership with City Graduate School Committee
4.	Ensuring a supportive environment for study including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agreement of student study plan • Student induction 	4,10,11,12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitoring by School Research (Degrees) Committees of agreed practice 	Supportive environment	Schools/Departments

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of doctoral training framework • Use of RaP • training for teaching (as required) 				
5.	MPhil to PhD transfer undertaken between 12 and 15 months of registration (or part-time pro-rata)	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revision and approval of existing Policy on Transfer from MPhil/PhD to PhD • Monitoring by School Board of Studies of agreed practice 	Mentoring and advising	Schools/Departments
6.	Regular monitoring after PhD transfer to submission	6,7,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitoring by School Board of Studies of agreed practice 	Progression monitoring	Schools/Departments
7.	Explicit preparation for the PhD viva	14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision of formal training of students on writing up and submission and mock viva 	Mentoring and advising	Schools/Departments
8.	Maximum period of remigration set to 4 years full time (8 years part time)	8,9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consultation with Boards of Studies • Approval of change in Regulations by Senate if appropriate 	Registration period	Boards of Studies Senate
9.	Ongoing development and improvement of RaP	4,5,6,7,10,11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide regular briefing sessions • Undertake staff/student usage monitoring and issues arising from its use • Work with system developers at Manchester to improve RaP for both students and staff 	Mentoring and advising and Progression monitoring	Students and Supervisors Schools/Departments in partnership with City Graduate School and Information Services
10.	Review and develop mechanisms for regular research degree data collection and analysis	13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create standard management information reports to support Schools in monitoring completion rates with a view to improvement 	Management Information	Academic Operations/Information Services in collaboration with Graduate School Office and Strategy and Planning Unit

11.	Support students to achieve good career opportunities	14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seek explicit and tailored career guidance support for doctoral students 	High level employability of City doctoral students	City Graduate School with careers service
12.	Ongoing enhancement through response to the University Research degree annual programme evaluation exercise and the outcomes of PRES biennially	All	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support actions in each School on measures to improve completion rates 	Mentoring and advising and Progression monitoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create enhanced admissions process; develop visiting doctoral programme; provide more opportunities for research students to present their research; organise better placement opportunities (Cass). • Set high entry requirements; enhance supervision skills; run a rigorous upgrade process; promote the effective use of RaP; restrict teaching responsibilities. (CLS) • Provide clear deadlines through RaP. (LEaD) • Organise termly supervision meetings; revision of upgrade process; enhance research culture; develop research seminar series; provision of more tailored career and professional development support. (SHS) • Creation of EC panels for research students to consider requests for suspensions and extensions; improved upgrade process. (SMCSE) • Ensure students are engaged with and aware of the response to the biennial PRES exercise to enhance the student experience

